

**Meeting Summary**  
**Design Workshop #1**  
**Executive Office Plaza/Heritage Center**  
**May 8, 2006**

## **Overview**

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Washington State's Department of General Administration (GA) is currently engaged in a predesign process for two properties at the intersection of 11<sup>th</sup> and Columbia in the City of Olympia. One property is the site of the current GA building, and the other currently is used for a parking lot and a small office/retail building. This new "Executive Office Plaza/Heritage Center" will be built with the primary purpose of creating new office space for state government.

Several factors are under consideration in this predesign process. Many government agencies and elected officials are interested in obtaining office space in the new buildings. A portion of one of the new buildings will house a new "Heritage Center" that will include the state library, state archives, and a public museum featuring the history of Washington State. And, given that the buildings are located on the edge of the Capitol Campus leading to downtown Olympia, there is also an opportunity to create a new transitional space or a "gateway" between these two areas.

The Department of General Administration is conducting a public involvement program to elicit public feedback related to this project. The purpose of this public involvement effort is to engage the Olympia community in an ongoing conversation about the future of this part of the Capitol Campus and about the proposed buildings. The opinions gathered through these discussions will be combined with other information provided by potential users of the new buildings, and will be used by the project architects, SRG Partnership, to develop and refine the design for the new facilities.

The goals for this public involvement program include:

- Ensure that members of the Olympia community are well-informed and invited to be involved in the design process.
- Engage stakeholders in substantive discussions related to the challenges and issues associated with the design.
- Summarize the results of the public involvement effort for both the GA and the Washington State Legislature, clearly demonstrating that public opinions have been listened to and incorporated into the design wherever possible.

There will be three public design workshops for the project. The first workshop was held May 8, and was a general brainstorming to "envision the possibilities" for the new project. The next two workshops are scheduled for June 26 and July 17. A completed predesign for the project will be submitted to the Washington State Legislature in August 2006. If the pre-

design is approved for funding, the project will move forward into final design and construction.

## Workshop Summary

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This workshop was publicized through emails to community groups and interested organizations, an advertisement that ran twice in the *Olympian*, posters in downtown shops and restaurants, and an invitational postcard mailed via zip-code sort to approximately 3,000 people in the vicinity of the project. Of the 56 people who attended, most said they had heard about the meeting through email, the newspaper ad, or the postcard invitation.

The meeting began with words of welcome from Linda Villegas Bremer, GA Director, and Peter Antolin, Deputy Director. Architects from the SRG Partnership provided a project overview, and Secretary of State Sam Reed added his remarks about the Heritage Center. At the end of the presentation, meeting participants went to one of three design tables where they worked directly with members of the architect team to share their ideas and visions for the project. Six people also elected to submit written comments. The ideas shared through the workshop are summarized below.

### EXISTING GA BUILDING

*There were conflicting opinions expressed about the existing GA building. For some people it represents the glory of 1950s Machine Age architecture, and they want it to be preserved. Others feel that the building should be demolished. Representative comments included:*

- Retain the design style of the building, whether it is remodeled or replaced. The design could be retained in window treatments and the use of stainless steel. The design makes for a good transition from the campus to the downtown area.
- Keep the current GA building and turn the lobby into a visitor center. Be sure to keep the mosaic, it is beautiful.
- This building is an important representation of 1950s machine-age architecture. It has a great deal of merit for the time it was built; it was a true innovation at that time. It is an important part of our history.
- Most people who work at the GA Building don't like it, but this is mostly a function of poor interior spaces and things like HVAC. To the extent that the GA building is good example of 50's modernism architecture, save the exterior and just fix the interior problems.
- This building is not that old. It would be a waste of money to tear it down.
- The building could be adaptively reused – keep some elements of it, but strip it to its shell and remodel the interior.
- Don't retain the 1950's architecture – this phase of architectural history can be preserved elsewhere. It is inappropriate in this setting.
- This building is guano. It is ugly and dysfunctional and it is difficult to navigate. It is an Edsel.
- The building should be reduced in size.

## **IDEAS FOR ANY BUILDINGS: ARCHITECTURAL STYLES AND ORIENTATION**

*Workshop attendees had creative ideas and visions for new buildings associated with the project, including:*

- New site and building design should use scale, materials, details, and building motifs to echo the older buildings on the Campus. These elements should also be used to unify buildings on the two sites.
- Traditional architecture, like the Capital Group, should not be ruled out. At the same time, the dominance of the Capitol Group/Dome should be maintained.
- There will probably be more demand to use this site than building remodels/replacement can possibly accommodate. These models/replacements also need to take a 100-year perspective – buildings and site design needs to be very flexible to adapt to future changes in uses and demands (decline in auto usage and the demise of printed books were two examples).
- Whatever gets put in this space has to outlast us. Any new buildings have to age gracefully.
- Any new building or remodel should be done to the highest LEEDS certification possible at the time.
- This city is named after Mt. Olympus, but we have virtually no orientation to the Olympic Mountains here! The new buildings should face Capitol Lake and the Olympics.
- It would be beautiful to design a new building with terraces that are oriented toward the lake. The terraces could be used for public events and gatherings.
- Make this a PRESTIGE attraction for the city. If this is done right, and well, it will drive new development in downtown.

## **THE AREA AS A GATEWAY**

*Workshop participants had a great deal of enthusiasm, and many creative ideas for, the way in which this area could better serve as a transition or gateway between the capitol campus and downtown Olympia. Thoughts included:*

- The area should be a gateway for visitors to the campus. This includes ideas for bus drop-off and a facility to greet visitors. Safety and easy access are two key components. It should also include a gift shop with items such as books and maps.
- We need to establish physical, visual, and activity connections between the Capitol Campus and downtown through site. Current buildings, uses, and site configurations tend to block such connections. The redeveloped site should be a “transition” between downtown and the Campus. One idea is to create an extension to the North Diagonal out through the downtown – either by extending the present Diagonal, or creating a parallel Diagonal through the 1063 Building site.
- Don’t close the section of Columbia that crosses the site to vehicular traffic, but redesign to make it more pedestrian friendly and to reinforce vistas of the Capitol

Campus, the lake and other views. Part of this approach could be a skybridge across Columbia to connect two parts of site.

- Don't leave Olympia out of this site! Open it up to us. There should not be a back door on any new buildings.
- People like to come out at night and go for a walk. There should be something interesting for them to look at here, something for them to do. The perimeter has to involve the public in some meaningful way.
- We should look beyond the limits of this project and build a promenade that extends to the lake and goes all the way around the campus.
- Tumwater is a disaster. There are all sorts of new state government buildings there that are completely shuttered at night. It is a huge barrier. We can't let that happen here.
- Orient the building toward the water to take advantage of the views. Access from the waterside to the building is important. Terrace the building facing the water. Close 11<sup>th</sup> to create a more pedestrian-friendly plaza.
- Whether the sites and buildings are re-done in a contemporary architectural style or otherwise, the buildings themselves and interior and exterior building and site spaces should feel "important". Visitors need to enter the buildings through lively, inviting and important looking spaces
- The site needs to be pedestrian-friendly, accessible, and "invite" people into and through the buildings and the area. Site and building design should pay particular attention to the sides with views; the grade change at site could make for some impressive views of lake, etc.
- These are large sites. They should be used as advantageously as possible. They need to be used to liven up this area.

#### **POSSIBLE NEW USES**

*Workshop attendees had a number of opinions about potential public uses for the new buildings.*

- Include retail in the building on the ground floor, as part of blurring the edge of the campus to downtown.
- Government should not be in the business of managing mixed use buildings, due to security and contracting concerns. The GA building should not be competing with downtown gift shops and restaurants.
- Any retail uses should be "secondary" – by locale, frontage, floor area, etc. – to the public functions of the buildings. Put retail and commercial services on upper floors; ground floor should be reserved for public functions and displays, especially if activities like museum exhibits are included in the building program. Street level windows and entries should be reserved for public exhibits and displays. If there are to be retail and commercial services, place them on upper floors or on the 1063 Building site on Capitol Way.
- We have enough retail in this city. We have enough shopping opportunities already. People don't come here from North Dakota to go shopping. What we need is a gathering space where people can see traveling art or historical exhibits, watch a movie, have a book club discussion.

- Create an auditorium space. This space should be for Capitol-related events and community events. Create a comfortable user-friendly space that can be used not only during business hours, but after business hours as well. Various sizes and configurations of such space should be included but should be designed to be flexible (avoid fixed seating for instance)
- This new space should offer people what they cannot get downtown. We need a place for kids where they can learn about their history.
- Offer better food choices for people who work in the building. The current cafeteria is not ventilated in a manner that allows for a grill, and that would be a good addition.
- It would be nice to have a restaurant on an upper floor where you could eat and also enjoy the view.
- Remodeling of the GA Building could include the creation of an interior atrium/courtyard and/or a roof garden/eco-roof. Roof-top space could accommodate a restaurant, and the views would be impressive.
- Olympia needs an Arts and Cultural Center, and that could also be included as part of this project.
- The space should accommodate room for an open air Arts Walk and/or new art galleries.
- Olympia already has plenty of open space. We don't need more of that.

## HERITAGE CENTER

*There was a great deal of enthusiasm and strong support for the new Heritage Center.*

*Representative comments included:*

- The Library is very important. It should be in a beautiful building.
- The Heritage Center should be a shining light on the campus. It should honor the past but also bring us into the future. Use the best 21<sup>st</sup> technology available.
- The Heritage Center should be on the bluff; it should be in the building that has terraces toward the lake. It should also be oriented in a way that ensures that the Capitol Dome is one of its principle views.
- The conservatory could become part of the Heritage Center. Right now it does not have any native plants, there is no connection between the conservatory and Washington State. It should include native plants that are relevant to our history.
- The degree to which the two buildings have similar or different functions – retail, office, public space, exhibit space, controlled archive and library space – will also have major implications on what can be accomplished. For instance, libraries and archives must have environmentally controlled space with controlled or very limited public access.
- Lots of historic and/or arts-related space should be included in the Heritage Center; it should also have room for traveling exhibits.
- There is one historic building left in the city. It is the Puget Sound Wesleyan Institute, which was built in 1858. That building could be moved to be in close proximity to the Heritage Center.

- The current visitors' center is very much underused. That's because it is a BIG ZERO.
- The Heritage Center could serve as an important bridge between the downtown and the campus. This is a place we want to be proud of; where we can bring visitors.

#### **TRANSPORTATION/PARKING/ACCESS**

*As workshop participants considered ideas for the new buildings, they also thought about transportation and parking issues, for example:*

- Parking could be located just to the north of the building in a new structure.
- There is already enough parking on the campus. The current garages could be refurbished with a "Dash-type" shuttle between the campus and downtown.
- Parking should be sized to accommodate new site and building activities that may attract more "customers" and at different times of day. If the buildings are dedicated to a great extent to the Archives and State Library, demand for parking may drop. If it's a public heritage center and offices, parking demand may go up.
- Any new parking structures should be provided off-site or underground, with frequent shuttle service to avoid using space to park cars, and spaces for handling tour and school buses and drop-off of auto passengers.
- Transportation Demand Management/Commute Trip Reduction should be considered in the design. This includes aspects such as pedestrian-oriented spaces and public transit access.
- Create better access to the buildings by taking advantage of Union and Columbia Streets. Make Capitol Way less appealing for use as an access route to the campus.
- Visitors/workers on the campus should be able to park at the Port of Olympia's parking lots. Those are underused.
- Is it possible to use this project to round off the corner on 11<sup>th</sup>? That access intersection to the campus is very awkward to maneuver as it is currently built.

#### **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

*Other comments from the assembled group included:*

- Are office buildings really the best way to use these spaces? This is prime real estate. It seems too precious to just have it be used for offices.
- These are all great ideas, but remember that this project has to be funded by the Legislature before it can be built. If it's important to us, we all need to lobby the State Legislature to make sure this gets fully funded. General Administration employees cannot lobby the legislature on behalf of this project.